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Sex Workers and Their Clients: Friends or Enemies?

This paper draws on a study of indoor female sex workers in Hong Kong. It attempts to understand the complex relationship between sex workers and their regular clients in flux through Giddens' concept of "plastic sexuality" and "pure relationship" (1992). While studies on prostitution have typically emphasised unequal power dynamic within the sex worker-client relationship, and highlighted the distinction between private and commercial sex maintained by sex workers, findings of my research suggest that the apparently romantic relationship between sex workers and their clients is ambivalent. Accounts given by sex workers reveal that their relationships were developed not merely on the basis of mutual sexual attraction or romantic love. While women's deviant identity contributed to their isolation from peer groups, regular clients were the main source of social and emotional support. This paper intends to explore the friendship aspect of the relationship between sex workers and their regular clients, an area which has received relatively little attention in studies on sex work today.